

# U.S. Human Rights and Democracy Strategy

## Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The U.S. Record 2006

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

*Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The U.S. Record 2006* describes the wide range of diplomatic tools we applied last year to support indigenous reform efforts across the globe.

There is no single formula for advancing personal and democratic freedoms. Our efforts focused on the three core components of a working democracy that must be present if human rights are to be effectively exercised and protected: One -- a free and fair elections process, with a level playing field to ensure genuine competition; Two -- good governance, with representative, transparent and accountable institutions operating under the rule of law, including independent legislatures and judiciaries, and; Three -- a robust civil society and independent media that can keep government honest, keep citizens engaged, and keep reforms on track. Where these three essential elements of democracy were weak, we worked to strengthen them; where they were under siege, we sought to defend them, and where they were non-existent due to government repression, we spoke out for those who live in fear yet dream of freedom.

As these reports indicate, we tailored our support for human rights and democracy to the challenges particular to each country and region. In the Western Hemisphere, for example, the principal challenge is democratic development -- helping democracies improve their capacity to deliver on the demands of their citizens for a better life. For many countries in Africa, ending violence remains central to improving human rights conditions and advancing governmental reforms. The challenges for human rights and democracy across South, Central and East Asia and the Pacific are as diverse as the countries in that vast expanse. In many cases, we helped democracies better address issues of governance to deepen the progress that they have made. In other cases, where leaders maintain control at the expense of the rights of their citizens, we spotlighted abuses and worked to expose populations to the global flow of ideas and information. In Europe, we continued to cooperate with our European partners to fulfill the vision of a continent that finally is whole, free and at peace. And in the broader Middle East and North Africa region, we responded to the growing demand for political, economic and educational reform through innovative multilateral and bilateral efforts such as the Forum for the Future and the Middle East Partnership Initiative.

Also in 2006, Secretary of State Rice announced two important initiatives in support of human rights and democracy defenders: a Human Rights Defenders Fund; and 10 guiding NGO Principles regarding the treatment by governments of nongovernmental organizations.

The Human Rights Defenders Fund will enable the State Department to quickly disburse small grants to human rights defenders facing extraordinary needs as a result of government repression. This funding, which will begin at \$1.5 million and will be replenished each year as needed, could go to cover legal defense or medical costs, or short-term support to meet the pressing needs of activists' families.

The 10 guiding [NGO Principles](#) will guide our own treatment of NGOs, and we also will use them to assess the actions of other governments. The Principles are meant to complement lengthier, more detailed, UN and other international documents addressing NGOs and other human rights defenders. We hope that our contribution of the 10 NGO Principles will help to rally worldwide support for embattled NGOs by serving as a handy resource for governments, international organizations, civil society groups and journalists.

Advances for human rights and democracy depend first and foremost on the courage and the commitment of men and women working for reform in their own countries. Progress also will require sustained and concerted efforts by the United States and fellow democracies in every region of the world. The path forward rarely will be linear. Fragile democracies can founder. Countries whose leaders are not fully committed to democracy can backslide. Those pressing for reform inevitably encounter push back from those who do not welcome change. These are sobering realities. At the same time, we believe that our work for freedom's cause can help to create new, hopeful realities for men and women across the globe.

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